

Teremok

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/31499780) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/31499780>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	Shadow and Bone (TV) , The Grisha Trilogy - Leigh Bardugo
Relationship:	The Darkling. Aleksander Morozova/Alina Starkov
Characters:	Alina Starkov , The Darkling. Aleksander Morozova , Mal Oretsev
Additional Tags:	minor charcter death , no beta we die like Mal should have in book 1 , Role Reversal , assassin Alina , shy Aleksander , Mal is a war criminal , Mal and Aleksander are cousins , Alina is a hot lady on a train , i mean i THINK it's a happy ending , what happens in tsibeya stays in tsibeya i guess , Darklina - Freeform , Alarkling - Freeform , also technically teremok in russian means little hideaway , but i do understand it's also a fast food chain , please just delete that last bit of info from your minds
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Darklina Week 2021
Collections:	Darklina Week 2021
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-24 Words: 2,681 Chapters: 1/1

Teremok

by [AceofNowhere](#)

Summary

The woman waited for him to continue, and he silently thanked her for her patience. He couldn't bear to have anyone prying into his business, but maybe she felt it too, that this midnight train confession would only be shared between the two of them. The dark and cold and better things to remember than these two passing strangers.

Darklina Week, Day 2 Prompt: Role!reversal. Assassin Alina, Shy Aleksander.

Aleksander took his seat, sat on the edge, and tried not to look too nervous. He could feel people jostling him as they passed in their bulky coats, all taking their seats on the midnight train to Tsibeya. It was a long journey, and Aleksander was only halfway through the 12-hour ride from Os Alta to the uppermost region of Ravka.

Aleksander caught glimpses of the people around him from the corner of his eye. He looked out the window, hiding his face from view while he made note of those in his car.

A young man fiddled with a contraption before him, taking diligent notes in a notebook filled with loose papers and sprawling writing. Two soldiers sat beside each other, as friendly with each other as two lovers might be. A lovely trolley carrier gave Aleksander a wink as she passed and he felt the heat climb up his face. He'd received attention from women before, but never had he gotten used to it.

Aleksander pulled the brim of his hat lower, and looked at the last person in his car.

A young woman, perhaps slightly older than he; she carried herself so confidently her age could fool anyone. She had a beautiful face: clear glowing skin, deep brown eyes slightly upturned, small but pronounced lips. But it was her hair that stopped Aleksander. A white mane of long flowing locks trailed down her chest, her arms, and back, so luminous it seemed to glow white.

She had angel hair, he thought, and then blushed from his silliness. As though she heard him, she locked her eyes with his and gave the most imperceptible of smiles.

Aleksander turned his face fully toward the black window facing the night, and willed himself to stop flushing.

It was pitch black outside; as the train began to move on its course again, Aleksander stared at his own reflection and dove deep into his thoughts. His own hair was as black as the night, his eyes a cross between gray and some indescribable deep brown. His chin was square, and he was certain with a full beard he might be perceived as quite handsome.

But he could never be as handsome as the lady across the car.

Time passed and Aleksander dozed a little. He read from his paper, he fiddled with his hands. He caught glimpses of the beautiful woman across the train.

Everytime he looked at her it was as though she could feel his eyes on her. She would lock gazes with him and smile that Mona Lisa smile, and Aleksander would blush deeper in turn. It was a game, and by the time 2 a.m. rolled around, he wasn't surprised—no, he had hoped—when she stood and walked toward him and took the seat that faced him.

He swallowed, doing his best impression of someone polite, someone gentle, and waited for her to say the first words to initiate the conversation. But several minutes went by without her saying a thing, and the only thing that indicated she was before him were the legs he saw visible beneath the brim of his hat.

He looked up cautiously and he saw her small grin widen.

“Interesting view?” she asked, smile slowly spreading across her face.

His breath caught in his throat, and he coughed a little. It felt like torture to be embarrassed and called out by the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen, but she nodded over to the window instead, and stared out at the black landscape surrounding them.

“You can’t see it now, of course,” she said. “But in the daylight, the snow is shockingly white.” She turned to smile at him again. “It’s blinded some men.”

Aleksander nodded, trying to find his voice. “So I’ve heard.”

Her smile stayed steady. “You’ve never been to Tsibeya.” She said it like she knew it, and she wasn’t wrong. Aleksander was there for a very particular mission, a secret one. No one went to Tsibeya unless it was absolutely necessary, and he wondered to himself what she could be doing so far from civilization.

“Do you drink coffee?” she asked, and flagged down the pretty trolley girl. She ordered them two coffees, his with milk and sugar, hers a stark black. Still, she took the small spoon offered to her and stirred her coffee methodically, gazing out the window as though she could see something he couldn’t.

He cleared his throat. “My name is Aleksander,” he took a sip of the hot coffee to calm himself as he stammered out his introduction. “Have, have you been to Tsibeya?”

She flashed her white teeth and took a sip without removing her eyes from him. “I have not,” she said. “Are you expecting to hear my name?”

Aleksander blinked. “Only if you wish to tell me, madam.”

She chuckled under her breath. “Madam. I do love hearing that title from beautiful young men.” Aleksander felt his face heat and took another sip of coffee. To be called beautiful from her felt like a prize. “Tell me, Aleksander, what are you doing in Tsibeya? You must have good reason to be so north in the dead of winter.”

Aleksander placed his saucer near his lap, steadying the cup as the train chugged diligently along. “Of sorts,” he said. He couldn’t tell her anything about it; he was the only one who knew what he was up there for.

Well, he and Malyen Oretzev, that is.

“I’m visiting a cousin,” he settled on this. “There’s been a death in the family, and we’re to arrange the funeral together.”

The woman looked at him silently, holding her coffee like she was sitting for a portrait. Her silence led his mouth to open again, and he involuntarily continued.

“He’s quite ill, you see,” he said, nervously sipping again from his coffee. It was lukewarm now, the chill on the train increased as they went further north, and now he could feel it in his

ankles, creeping up his legs, into his fingers and fingertips.

The cold bled through, and the woman smiled at him as he kept talking.

“It’s difficult for him to get to town,” he finished.

The woman nodded. “I see. He must live a lonely life, ill and alone.”

Aleksander frowned into his coffee. It was just past 3 in the morning and even with the most beautiful woman sitting before him, he began to feel sleep overtake his senses.

“I imagine so,” he said, “but Ma--my cousin can do well alone. He’s a hunter, and he often tracks alone.”

“A hunter in the north,” the woman said, finishing her coffee and placing the saucer on the seat beside her. “That brings up quite the image, doesn’t it?”

Aleksander almost laughed. His cousin indeed. Malyen was his cousin, technically, several times removed, but there would be no funeral to care for. Malyen and he had other business to take care of while he would be north, and there would be no sentimentality about it.

“How do you find yourself north, madam?” he said the name again, in hopes it would gain more of her approval. She smiled and he felt his chest warm, a win against the cold.

“I find myself in anticipation,” she said, staring into his eyes. “The north has sometimes called to me, I think. Have you ever thought to come here before, if not for your cousin and your help he needs?”

Aleksander scoffed and took a final sip of coffee, echoing his companion and placing it on the seat beside him. “I can’t say that I have,” he admitted. “But he does need my help, couldn’t continue without it.”

Aleksander felt his mind wander. He was so tired, and while the coffee should have kept him awake and alert, he felt sleepier than ever. The woman in front of him was so calming. He was going north, he reasoned, he’d never see her again he was sure.

“Truth be told,” Aleksander said, confessing part of the truth. “I don’t want to help him.”

The woman waited for him to continue, and he silently thanked her for her patience. He couldn’t bear to have anyone prying into his business, but maybe she felt it too, that this midnight train confession would only be shared between the two of them. The dark and cold and better things to remember than these two passing strangers.

“He’s borish,” he said, “and unkind. He’s done something—things—few could forgive.” Aleksander’s hands shook as he recalled the headlines on the paper, of the assassination attempt against his cousin’s life, of Malyen calling him and demanding he come north so he could sign the papers that would give him financial freedom enough to live out the rest of his days in secrecy and solitude. Aleksander knew the assassination attempt was deserved. Malyen had been a major in the last war; he’d sent so many people to prison, to be killed, for

reasons no more substantial than for stealing bread, or for writing the truth in the newspaper about the corrupt totalitarian government that took more than they gave.

But Aleksander was one person, Malyen was one person, and there was nothing more either of them could contribute to this world. If Aleksander completed this task, he knew Malyen would be forced to stay in the north, and could never show his face anywhere he could cause harm again. Aleksander had made sure of it with the papers he'd drawn up.

Malyen would be of no harm to anyone, come morning.

"Would you forgive him?" Aleksander was startled out of his thoughts and looked back at the woman before him. She seemed intent on him, as though his answer might mean something to her.

"I," he began, but his voice caught in his throat. He looked down at his shivering hands, clenched them in his lap. "I don't know."

The last thing he saw before sleep took him was her small smile.

The bell blew and Aleksander startled awake. He looked around to see his companions around him grabbing their coats sleepily, taking their luggage and stumbling out the car door toward the rising sun in Tsibeya.

Aleksander looked in front of him, but all traces of the woman from that night were gone. Even the saucer beside her seat was missing, though the one beside him was stone cold and had just a bit of dried coffee at the bottom to prove he'd had something during the night.

Aleksander put on his hat and coat, grabbed his small bag filled with papers to sign and complete, and headed out to call a taxi.

The snow in the early light glimmered from the window of the taxi, and Aleksander was mesmerized by how beautiful such a blistering climate could seem with a little light shining on it. He wondered if Malyen would be happy here, if anyone who lived here appreciated the full beauty of this cold, terrifying place. He remembered the night, how black the window had seemed, so desolate even on the borders of such land.

He'd all but forgotten the beautiful woman with the angelic hair as he paid the taxi and stepped up to the house, alone and still waking with the rising sun.

He wasn't shocked that the door was unlocked, but when he opened the door and saw the red walls glistening in the sunlight, his bag dropped from his hands, and the papers spilled over the wooden porch.

Pulled by some unknown force, Aleksander entered the house, Malyen's name caught in his throat. Red splatters danced across the wallpaper and Alexander felt his breath come faster, more panicked.

"Malyen," he tried to call, but it came as a whisper. Aleksander almost slipped and when he looked beneath his feet he drew his hand to his mouth and his shoulders trembled with a

bone-deep fear, deeper than the cold blowing in from the open door.

Pools of blood so deep every step Aleksander took flicked backward and forward, like small splashes caused from a rain puddle. It stuck to the bottom of his shoes like mud. Aleksander stepped to the side, but the blood came with him, and his footprints littered the house now.

Aleksander rushed forward now, not knowing where he was going or what he would find.

“Malyen,” he said, a little louder. “Malyen—!”

“He’s not here, Aleksander.”

Aleksander stopped in his tracks, staring at what he couldn’t believe was before him. The woman from the train stood over Malyen’s corpse—that was all it was now, a body with hole after hole after hole driven through him—her hair dusted in red blood.

“No one is here Aleksander. Malyen left days ago.”

They were in the kitchen, he realized, and she stepped over the body in her light heeled boots and began to wash the knife in the sink. She did so methodically, all while Aleksander struggled to breathe and carefully ignored the dead body of his cousin just steps away. Instead he focused on the meticulous work of her hands while she removed every drop of blood from the knife, while she flicked it dry and placed it back into its resting place on the block. She grabbed a rag and wiped down the counter, as though she’d just made lunch and was cleaning up while she waited for the kettle to boil and make them a cup of tea.

“There’s nothing here for you, Aleksander.”

He gazed at her, mouth open and disbelieving. How, why—

“He took something from me, Aleksander,” she said quietly. “I wanted it back.”

She sat in a chair and called him over to her. Legs willing while his mind reeled (but quieted, it seemed so quiet around her), he stepped over the body and sat next to her at the table.

“We can’t always have what belongs to us,” she said. “When something is taken, sometimes it’s gone forever, you see?”

He nodded, though he didn’t understand.

She could see that, and she smiled at him. “You said he’d done things that couldn’t be forgiven. You said you didn’t know if you could forgive him.”

The woman looked at Mal with her secret smile, like she was staring at a sleeping child than a bloody and fresh corpse.

“I can forgive him,” she said. “But only when he’s like this.”

Aleksander swallowed, and maybe he understood a little.

“Would you like to know who I am, Aleksander?”

He hesitated and she laughed. “Not many know my real name,” she placated him. “Telling it to you won’t cause you any harm.”

Aleksander could hear the birds fluttering and calling to each other outside. He found it remarkable that he still found this beautiful, her, beautiful, even in the cruelty of that morning.

“Who are you?”

She smiled. “My name is Alina. Will you remember me?”

Aleksander nodded. “Alina,” he whispered, and he thought he saw her shiver.

Alina stood, and stared down at Malyen’s body one last time. “I’m so glad, Aleksander,” she said, but it didn’t sound like she was speaking to him. She began to walk away, her feet barely made a sound as they tapped against the wet wood beneath them.

But before she entered the hallway, away from his sight, she turned back to him. She held out her hand.

“Aleksander,” she asked. “Would you ... would you come with me?”

Aleksander stared at her hand, which beamed in the light of the morning. He thought about her name, Alina, and knew that right then, it meant little to him.

But with Malyen’s forgiven body bleeding on the floor, he thought he could learn to make it mean something to him. He felt peace, in that moment, with the papers fluttering and gone in the barren snowland, the oblivious birds chirping away as the day began, and people miles away remained ignorant of the many crimes held softly in this house.

Aleksander rose, and took her hand.

She smiled, and he smiled back.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!